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The Art Gallery

ROBERT W. MACBETH.



"THE CALL TO LABOR," BY R. W. MACBETH.

In the school of British landscape of to-day, the Scotch painters are a factor of considerable importance, and among them none has more deservedly won a prominent place than Robert W. Macbeth. The work of this popular artist has been by no means confined to landscape, although his force and originality in that branch of art alone would entitle him to high rank. From the introduction of picturesque groups of rustic figures into his landscapes, he has become a genre painter of recognized ability. He was born in Glasgow in 1840, his father being Norman Macbeth, a Scottish portrait painter. He studied in the Royal Academy, and has since followed his profession in London. He was elected an Associate of the Society of Painters in Water-Colors in 1871, exhibiting there and in the Royal Academy pictures mostly genre in character, and relating generally to modern life. Among his somewhat idealized transcripts of agricultural scenes may be mentioned his "Potato Harvest in the Fens," sent to the Royal Academy in 1877, "Sedge-Cutting in Wicken Fen, Cambridge-shire," in 1878, and "Early Morning." The same year he sent to the Paris Exhibition the "Potato Harvest in the Fens" and his "Lancashire Gang," two of his best works. His "Call to Work" and "Return of the Fishermen" were among his more recent contributions to the Royal Academy. To the Grosvenor Gallery—the formidable rival of the latter—he sent in 1879 "The End of the Journey," and last year "Miss Milly Fisher," "A Flood in the Fens," and "Landing Sardines at Low Tide."

Mr. Macbeth is also favorably known as a water-color artist. Among his aquarelles may be mentioned "Linked Names," "Land at Last," "News," "A Winter's Walk," "Motherly Indulgence," "The Morning Post," "The Ghost Story," and "Lady Bountiful." In the use of the needle he ranks perhaps among the best of the present British etchers. His plate in a recent issue of *The Portfolio*, of a Cambridge-shire ferry, with gipsies and gleaners crossing together, is perhaps in his best vein. It is after a painting which he will probably exhibit at the Royal Academy this year. The time of day chosen for the picture is toward sunset, with long shadows falling on part of the figures and landscape. Mr. Macbeth of late years has etched most of his works, in some instances, as in these just mentioned, the etching being done from the finished picture, and in others from the first dead coloring or rough sketch on the canvas. Mr. Hamerton has a high opinion of Mr. Macbeth as an etcher, but notices that he "has two distinct and opposite manners—one comprehensive and sketchy, and the other laborious and minute, with the fulness of a carefully finished drawing, but none of the liberty of a sketch." The Cambridge ferry plate in *The Portfolio* is an excel-

lent example of the latter manner, as is "The Landing of Sardines," in "L'Art" of the other. The etching in "L'Art," our readers may remember, was especially commended by us in our notice in February of the last quarterly volume of that excellent publication.

From our illustrations of Mr. Macbeth's paintings our readers will form some idea of his charming versatility and the powerful human interest of his subjects which has contributed largely to his popular success. With what pathos he tells the story of desolation in "A Flood in the Fens;" how true to nature, how strong in action is the Brittany fish-wife bringing her load to shore; what joyousness and nimbleness of motion are seen in the pretty English child treading the crisp snow; and how full of sweet womanliness and dignified resignation is the dear kindly old face of "somebody's mother" nearing "The End of the Journey"



"MISS MILLY FISHER." BY R. W. MACBETH.

of life! It is not difficult to understand the success of a painter at once so tender in sentiment and so powerful in its portrayal as Mr. Macbeth. Such men we believe are the glory of the art world of to-day, and we cannot doubt that the healthful influence of their pure manly work will live long after the meretricious glitter of the works of some of their more brilliant Gallic neighbors shall have ceased to satisfy the taste of the picture connoisseur of the period. The time, perhaps, is not far distant when works like those of the Macbeth school will find their way to the galleries of American collectors, even if the now all-powerful dealer has to be ignored in the transaction. The sentiment of such paintings is surely more in accord with the purity of American domestic life than that reflected by the semi-nudities or soulless frivolities of the modern sensual French school, which too often find a place in the galleries of our collectors. The ladies of the household,

with their improving taste and knowledge in art matters, may have more to say in the future as to the selection of paintings than they have had in the past; and when their voice is heard, who can doubt that it will be in favor of the more virile, natural and healthful art?

"GRETA'S" BOSTON LETTER.

FLEMISH MASTERPIECES FROM SAN DONATO—FULLER'S "WINNEFRED DYSART"—ART NOTES.

BOSTON, March 13, 1881.

In the scattering abroad of Prince Demidoff's treasures from the famous auction sale at the San Donato Museum last year, ten Flemish paintings of the first quality have fallen to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts—at least have been offered to the Museum at just what they cost a Boston gentleman who was a bidder at the sale. One was injured on the way over, and nine are exhibited at present. These are by David Teniers, Jr., Jacob Van Ruysdael, Jan Van Huysum, Simon Verelst, Willem Kalf, Gabriel Metsu, Albert Cuyp, Nicholas Maas, and Caspar Netscher. The tenth is a landscape by Ruysdael with figures by Wouvermann, and cannot be exhibited till the injury to its varnish incurred during transportation is repaired. The Teniers is "facile princeps." All are in trim good order, but this has a bright, fresh, clean gayety of color that gives the lie to its two hundred and fifty years. It might have been painted in Paris last year had Meissonier been Teniers. It is a horrid subject—simply the carcass of a huge "beef" just slaughtered and hung up spread open to the spectator. The bold brutality of its presentation in its mass and prosaic detail is one token of a painter conscious and confident of his greatness. The audacity of the choice of such a subject for an important work is vindicated by the superb display of power of which it is made the occasion. The mass of the huge object in hand is constantly kept pressing upon the mind all the while that the amazed and admiring observation is busy with the wonders of minute delineation. There hangs the red-and-white mountain of flesh, with the blood dripping into an earthen pan set beneath it (which a dog licks up sickeningly), a girl on one side cleaning the "liver and lights," grasping the stout windpipe without a qualm, and the head, denuded of its skin to the stubbly bristles of the dumb lips, and with

the ox's eye looking out through its net-work of veins, set on a bench on the other side. But while you take note of all these details—of the fidelity with which the various membranes, tissues, bunches of fat, muscles, and torn tendons are depicted; how the girl's one hand sinks into a spongy mass while the other slips upon gristle; how the earthen Dutch pan shines with its glaze; how the hide, with the horns, dropped in a heap in a shadowy corner, reeks with bloody moisture—you never lose consciousness of the towering mass of the carcass. The facile subtlety of this merging of detail in the mass and main subject is the "cachet" of the masterpiece, vulgar as the subject is. Nowhere in all the minutiae is there any sign of labor, nor any failure to reveal the uttermost particulars while fusing them in their proper subordination to the whole.

The Van Huysum flower-piece is scarcely less wonderful in this regard. Here is a large, rich maze of

roses, hyacinths, peonies, tulips, narcissus, and poppy-buds gathered in "admired disorder" in a sculptured marble vase. The colors, to be sure, are faded into soft minor harmony, though clear and beautiful. But the gorgeous effect of the whole is still undiminished, while the drawing and painting is so close that one sees



"LANDING SARDINES AT LOW TIDE."
BY R. W. MACBETH.

the dewdrops on the leaves, the dust on the stamens, and the veins within the petals, when one looks. The infinite varieties of "texture" in the tender blossoms, the age and stain of damp upon the marble vase, are all completely set forth, yet without a trace of painful elaboration, without a sign of piling up or glazing down of paint, which seems everywhere as thin as varnish.

The Ruysdael landscape is a somewhat sombre example, with the leaves of the foliage of the trees something too much picked out in detail after the ancient style. But the great bulks, mass, and values of air and space and out-of-door light are there, and the beautiful, lightly clouded sky of Ruysdael. The Cuyt has reposing cattle grouped in the foreground and silhouetting against a sweet hazy distance, in a composition of the most dignified simplicity and classic purity of taste—so true a generalization of such scenes that it seems to be something we have always known, like an axiom or proverb. The Metsu is the "Usurer" that has been engraved by Leopold Flameng, a serious, powerfully-painted picture of a matter-of-fact gentleman counting the money laid down by a woman, who is wringing her hands in agony—and really doing it, too. The unmoved coolness of the strongly characterized money-lender is not greater than the calmness of reserved power with which this affecting picture was conceived and executed. The Maas is "The Jealous Husband," coupled by good authorities with "The Listener" by the same pupil of Rembrandt's. It is another fine example of the power of characterization attained in the Flemish school. The face of the man, who is standing on the stairs leading from his study in clear shadow to the pleasant sitting-room below, in a wonderfully natural and clear indoor light, where sits a woman in close conversation with a visitor—is clearly that of a man who has made a business of watching and listening, and rather triumphs in the success at last of his long-continued pains to prove himself a wronged husband. The Verelst is a picture of a dead game-bird suspended by a string tied to one claw; the Kalf a large still-life of fruit and vegetables; the Netscher a decorative piece showing sculpture upon architecture around two children blowing soap-bubbles at a window. The pictures are well known to connoisseurs and collectors, have their place in all catalogues and histories of their school, and have most of them been engraved. The Teniers was etched by himself. It is too late in the day to criticise them; even to point out or dwell upon their virtues and beauties seems rather an impertinence in America, considering how long their position has been established in Europe. Yet the gilded art-patrons who have been invited to subscribe the \$25,000 that will secure them for the Art Museum come

and pick many flaws in these Dutch masters. One of them finds the carcass in Teniers' picture out of proportion to the human figures; another would as soon buy a flower frontispiece from "Godey's Lady's Book" as the Van Husysum; another would not give five cents for the lot. This would be less surprising if the

pictures were grimy and indistinct "old masters;" but they are as clear and bright as chromos, so far as condition goes.

George Fuller, the honored Nestor of New England painters, has been thinking that he was more esteemed in New York than Boston, and his latest production, "Winnefred Dysart," he has been working to finish for this spring's National Academy exhibition, in the hope of its attaining something of the success of his "And She was a Witch" and "The Romany Girl" in your city. But as it approached completion it was seen by an enterprising dealer, who persuaded Mr. Fuller to expose it here first. After one day's exhibition there were three bids for it, at the artist's own price, the highest he ever put on a work of his, and "Winnefred Dysart" remains in Boston. The venerable and eminent connoisseur and critic, Mr. Thomas G. Appleton, pens a Laus Deo to the papers upon this rescue of a Boston masterpiece for Boston. He says: "Mr. Fuller is now recognized as a missionary from the region where Raphael and Correggio dwelt, and his mission is full of meaning. He proclaims that dear old light which never was on sea or land. He may prove the herald of a great dispensation, the forerunner of the recovery of that old gospel the world once loved. We are weary of a realism so perfect, yet so cheap that crowds can attain to it. In this sense Mr. Fuller's art may be of the highest signifi-



"THE END OF THE JOURNEY."
BY R. W. MACBETH.

cance. We thank him heartily for what he has done, and rejoice to know that the sweet face of 'Winnefred Dysart' does not go a-begging in foreign towns, but is to stay where she belongs, at home in Boston." It is simply the picture of any little New England maiden, bareheaded in the open air, with her arms hanging



"A FLOOD IN THE FENS." BY R. W. MACBETH.

simply down along her simple white dress, an idly plucked bouquet of wild flowers in one hand. She may be fourteen, fifteen, or sixteen years old. That baby-like sweetness of face and utter unconsciousness of sex, that childish confidence of innocence, dreaming of no guile and fearing none, that ingenuous, wholesome,

girlhood which Winnefred Dysart typifies is lost in some children earlier than in others. It may be changed into conscious womanhood in a night—in an hour. To tall Winnefred Dysart, with her "solid curves of healthful strength and painless nerves," life is still as simple and sweet as to the daisies at her feet;



"THE RETURN FROM FISHING."
BY R. W. MACBETH.

like them she only holds her frank, lovely open face to the soft summer sky and breeze, and her joy in living knows nothing else, if indeed it is wholly conscious of itself. Such an ideal created for us is certainly entitled to the much-abused adjective "precious." It has grown out of Fuller's well-known way of working. It could hardly have come by any other means. You know his hazy, half-defined figures, losing themselves in clouds of orange-and-pink "tone." These clouds are the residuum of his dreamings and musings, and his strivings to realize them. For four years, it is said, has "Winnefred Dysart" been slowly shaping her dainty, dear, delicious face in these clouds of tentative, wistful touches. For four months the ideal has been so near the artist's grasp that he could leave her for no other work. At last the vision came clear, the presence stood there in all its character, oneness, and distinctness. To an artist working in this way the moment of leaving off is the crisis and test; in this case that has been a happy and triumphant one for Fuller, for it has produced, so all say here, the American picture of the year.

The St. Botolph Club artists have just indulged in another little exhibition by themselves in the club gallery. A new portrait by F. P. Vinton easily took the first place in interest, a clear and manifest gain in sympathetic characterization and in combining sweetness with strength. Vinton's achievement, by dint of unremitting work and candid self-criticism, is rapidly catching up with his ambition, which is of the highest. He now occupies W. M. Hunt's studio, though not yet precisely Hunt's place in portraiture. But he has twenty years in which to work up to that.

Miss Helen M. Knowlton, Hunt's pupil, and the head of a devoted band of his feminine followers, has just exhibited a portrait of him, which is remarkable for its masculine handling and rugged strength. The most extraordinary colors and daring breadth of laying on make up an effective and truthful presentation of the handsome face and its manly character.

An exhibition of etchings by Stephen Parrish, a Philadelphia artist, surprises by its testimony to the existence of an American etcher who takes rank with the very best. To clean, crisp fidelity of line in the drawing of landscape and water views he has known how to add the qualities that make up the atmosphere, tone, and poetry of a picture—not in any flippant, sketchy, haphazard way, but in a genuine thoughtfulness, serious purpose, and refined grace.

The great triennial "Mechanics' Fair" is to have its art exhibition again, and in the plans for the new permanent building, the cornerstone of which is to be laid day after to-morrow, provision is made for a hall for paintings, which will

be one of the largest and finest picture galleries in the country. This exhibition three years ago awarded gold and silver medals. There is talk of meeting one objection raised against the awards made at that time, by putting *all* the principal art dealers of the city on the committee which acts as jury.

GRETA.